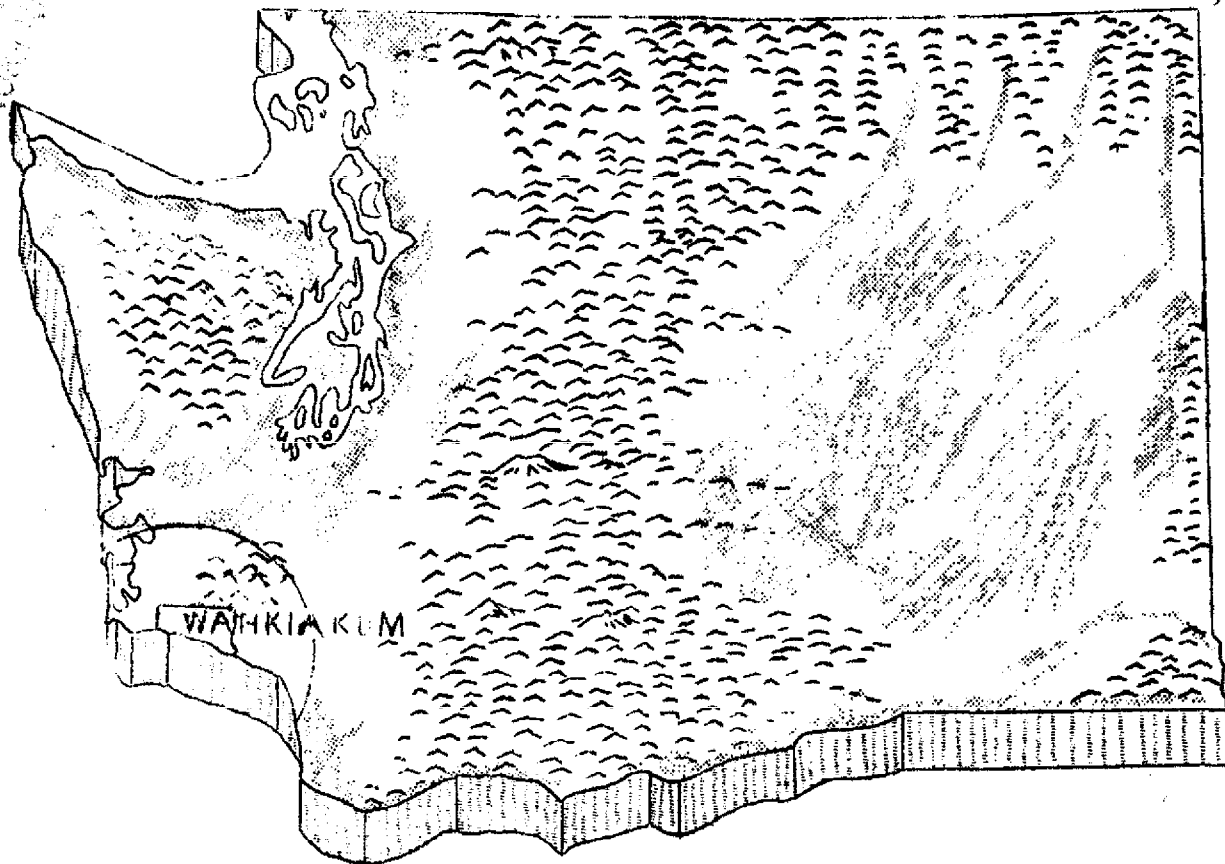


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# WAHKIAKUM COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES  
1956

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
J. D. Dwyer, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
S. R. Newell

WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE  
348 Federal Office Building  
Seattle 4, Washington

This book on Wahkiakum County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Sverre N. Omdahl, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, 1948-56. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprises and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Wahkiakum County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Wahkiakum County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over-all appreciation of Wahkiakum County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1860 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Wahkiakum County in 1854. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold, D. W. Barrowman and Christian A. Stokstad, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. Vladimir Kovalik, University of Washington graduate student in geography, compiled most of the statistical tables and graphs. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director  
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Olympia, Washington  
September 15, 1957

Funds for this bulletin provided by the Washington State Department of Agriculture were matched by the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

## PART I

### History of Wahkiakum County Agriculture

#### Introduction

Wahkiakum County is a land of forested Coast Range hills and valley bottoms located near the mouth of the Columbia River in southwestern Washington. Its history and economic development have been closely related to the settlement of the lower Columbia River shoreline where fishing and lumbering were long the primary industries.

Wahkiakum is one of fourteen Washington State counties which have Indian names. Wahkiakum means "tall timber" in the Chinook Indian language. This name was given to a small group of coast fishermen Indians living along the Columbia River by the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-1806. This expedition also recorded the Indian name "Cathlamah" (Indian for stone) for another group of Indians who lived at a rocky course in the river. The name of the county seat Cathlamet came from this word.

With an area of only 269 square miles, Wahkiakum is the smallest county on the mainland of Washington. Only two other Washington counties located in Puget Sound waters have lesser land areas--San Juan and Island. Although it is small in area and population compared to the larger counties of Washington, Wahkiakum has played an important role in the history of dairying and mint farming in the state. At an early date, its farmers marketed products to Portland by water and to active local fishing and lumbering industries on the river shores. Puget Island, a diked and drained area in the channel of the Columbia River, is one of the most fertile and well-developed farming areas in western Washington.

When the first census was taken by the county assessor in 1853, Wahkiakum had a population of 53. The population increased steadily to 4,286 in 1940, then decreased slightly during the 1940-1955 period. About one-fifth of the county land area, or 33,235 acres, was in farms in 1954. A total of 376 farms produced products valued at \$1,304,000 in the economy of Wahkiakum County.

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History 1/

The first white men to see the present area of Wahkiakum County were the American explorer, Captain Robert Gray and the crew of his ship, Columbia Redivia. The vessel entered the Columbia River, May 11, 1792, and ran aground on a sand bar in Gray's Bay near the mouth of the Gray's River. This bay and river in the western part of the county were named after Captain Gray. In October of the same year, an English vessel of the Captain George Vancouver expedition, commanded by Lt. William Broughton, sailed even farther up the Columbia River. Broughton named Puget Island after an officer in the Vancouver expedition, whose name was also given to Puget Sound. These mariners had a brief contact with the Indians in the lower Columbia River.

In the fall of 1805 the Lewis and Clark expedition of the United States passed along the river shore of the county. While encamped at the present site of Astoria, Oregon, the expedition had some contact with the present Wahkiakum County area. Observations made by Lewis and Clark indicate that there was a large Indian (Chinook) population living in this region. Four closely related groups of Indians ranged by canoe on the Columbia River and lived comfortably by salmon fishing and hunting. The present site of Cathlamet had a large encampment.

According to Strong 2/ a large settlement of Indians using the Chinook language lived around Puget Island and on the uplands overlooking the river at Cathlamet. Once numbering between 500 and 1,000, their numbers were lowered by diseases by 1840. These Wahkiakum area settlements included closely related groups of Chinook Indians known as Cathlamets, Wahkiakums and Coweliskies (Cowlitz). They ranged from the mouth of the Columbia to as far as the Cascades in their hunting and food gathering and were active in the fur trading business with Americans and British at Fort Astoria and Fort Vancouver. The "Chinook

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1/ Material used in this historical and description summary has been obtained from the following authors and publications:

- (1) James E. Brooks. "Wahkiakum County, Washington: A Case Study in the Geography of the Coast Range Portion of the Lower Columbia River Valley", Master of Arts Thesis, Geography, University of Washington, Seattle, 1952. 130 P.
- (2) Mrs. Maude K. Butler. "Wahkiakum". The Book of the Counties, 1953. A publication of the Washington State Associations of County Commissioners and County Engineers in cooperation with the State College of Washington. Distributed by Seattle-First National Bank, Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. and Standard Oil Company of California. 1953. pp. 81-84.
- (3) Belle Reeves, Secretary of State, The Counties of Washington (Wahkiakum County). (Prepared by Richard M. Perry, Supervisor, Bureau of Statistics) Olympia, Washington, 1943.
- (4) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State, American Guide Series. Compiled by the Federal Writers' Project, WPA. Published by the Washington State Historical Society. Binford & Mott, Portland, Oregon, 1941. pp. 411-413.

2/ Thomas N. Strong, Cathlamet on the Columbia, Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Press, 1907. pp. 1-3.

Jargon", a fur trader's language, developed between the whites and the Indians and had wide use in southwestern Washington.

James Birnie, a former employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, was the first land settler in the area. Birnie, who was of Scotch descent, established a trading post at Cathlamet in 1846 and claimed all the farming land of Puget Island and the Elokomin River Valley. The United States Government did not recognize Birnie's claim to such a large area, but did grant him a donation land claim of 640 acres. The second settler--William Strong--took up a land claim in the Cathlamet area in 1850. The earliest settler in the western portion of the county was another Scot, "Red" Harrington, who lived at Pillar Rock in 1848. The first settler in the Skamokawa River vicinity was a Virginian--J. T. Lutes--who homesteaded near the town site of Skamokawa in 1868. Other early pioneers taking up lands were as follows: Newell D. Bears, 1853; Laban Stillwell, 1853; Thomas Dray, 1853; Gustavus Krebs, 1854; Chas. McCall, 1854; William Jackson, 1853 and Ralph C. Elliot, 1858.

Barreling and packing salted salmon was the first important industry. It attracted some of the earliest leaders in commerce. In 1866, the first commercial salmon cannery on the Columbia River was built by William Hume at Eagle Cliff, Wahkiakum County. Three years later the Warren Packing Company located a cannery at Cathlamet. Canneries were then built at Brookfield, Pillar Rock and Altoona. By 1885 there were 35 packing plants on the Columbia and Wahkiakum County ranked high in the state and national commerce of fish products. Boating and cannery work related to salmon fishing attracted Scandinavians and Finns to Wahkiakum County. Although mainly occupied by fishing, many of these homesteaded and purchased farmland along the banks of the Columbia and the Grays and Deep River Valleys.

Because ocean-going vessels could use the small Columbia River ports to load lumber, piling and logs, the rich forest of the county became an important basis of industry. Logging operations began at Cathlamet about 1860 and moved up the Elokomin Valley into the Willapa Hills. A large sawmill was built at Skamokawa and a barrel making factory was located at Brookfield before 1870. Numerous homesteaders and other settlers were rafting red cedar shingle bolts to Astoria, Oregon. By 1900, over a dozen logging companies were operating in the hilly forests of the interior. Steam powered equipment and railroads were used to get the timber to the Columbia River. Wahkiakum County's timber was mainly exported to other areas for milling.

Since 1924, large timber owning companies have played a major role in the economy. The largest industry was provided by the Crown-Willamette Paper Company, a division of the Crown Zellerbach Corporation. This concern located its division at Cathlamet in 1924 and built a railroad up the Elokomin River. It now owns and manages 67,120 acres in the Willapa Hills on a sustained forest yield basis and provides the largest payroll in the county. The main area which supplies pulpwood is managed as the Cathlamet Tree Farm. This tree farming is a modern form of agriculture which involves continuous employment in harvesting, planting and protection of a tree crop used for pulp and paper.

Agriculture has been of secondary importance to forestry and fishing, but has shown a steady progress. Individuals and concerns have played an important part in making the county important in livestock products and some specialty

crops. Pioneer farmers from the beginning combined commercial dairying with off-farm work in fishing and lumbering. Cream and butter was sold to ships or was boated to markets on the river at Astoria and Portland, Oregon. After 1930, agriculture replaced the declining salmon fishing industry and was second to the forest industries in value to Wahkiakum County.

Dairying was advanced when the Proebstal brothers established a creamery at Skamokawa in 1895. In 1898 Wahkiakum County farmers established one of the first dairy cooperatives in the state and purchased the Proebstal Creamery. The Grays River Cooperative built a creamery at Grays River. The Lower Columbia Cooperative Dairy Association, located at Grays River, consolidated the marketing of cream and butter and after 1930 managed the sale of whole milk. This association has continued as a leader in the dairy industry. Dairy herds were improved and the county became noted for its registered Jersey and Guernsey cattle. The Jersey herd of O. P. Dosland at Grays River was registered in 1897, the first to be registered in Washington State. The first county agricultural agent assigned to Washington State, George Nelson, came to Wahkiakum County in 1922. He did much to advance the quality of dairy farming.

The organization of a diking project for Puget Island in 1914 was an important event. Consolidated Diking District Number One was organized and bonds were issued to finance the project. Puget Island, previously used little for agriculture, was diked and reclaimed in 1915. The Corps of Army Engineers improved the dikes after 1936. Puget Island became the richest agricultural area in the county with over 175 farms noted for cattle and mint farming and later, cucumber growing. In 1948 a high flood crest of the Columbia broke the dikes and flooded the island, bringing a million-dollar loss to the population.

The County of Wahkiakum as a government was created by the Washington Territorial Legislature, April 25, 1854. It was organized from the southwestern corner of the elder Lewis County. Cathlamet was designated as the county seat. A factor which led the few hundred settlers to seek countyhood was their isolation and difficulty of travel overland across the Willapa Hills to the Lewis County seat at Chehalis. The county's population was closely related to the fishing and trade on the Columbia River. Its shape and size corresponds closely to the trading hinterland of the river town, Cathlamet.

For many years the county lacked good overland roads and was almost entirely dependent on Columbia River shipping to market its products. The financing and building of roads through the heavily forested Coast Range was a major public issue. Not until about 1924 was it possible for auto vehicles to reach Cathlamet from the mainland of Washington. In 1930 the Ocean Beach Highway (U.S. 830) was opened to end the county's isolation and free it from dependence on boats, ferries and ships.

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